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## NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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# B1 Executive Director's Report

February 2026

## Action Memo

### NOAA Fisheries VIP visit

Mr. Sam Rauch, NOAA Fisheries Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs, will attend the Council meeting on Thursday February 5th. Welcome to the North Pacific Council meeting!

### Public Comments on EO 14276 / Opportunity to Review the Council Workplan

NMFS has distributed a summary of the public comments received nationally on Executive Order 14276 'Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness' (attached on the eAgenda). The Council has been asked to review the public comments and consider whether the Council would like to provide any updates to the [NPFMC workplan](#) that we submitted in October 2025.

We have not been given access to the actual comment letters themselves, and the summary provided is very high-level. From an initial staff overview, the comments specific to the North Pacific appear to fall into four general themes:

- Broad scale management and Council priorities in the North Pacific- regulatory approaches to trawl fishing, bycatch issues, integrating local and traditional knowledge in the management process, protecting subsistence use and food security, supporting science-based management, prioritizing surveys, examining assessment frequency, and utilizing new technologies.
- Topics related to the management of Cook Inlet Salmon- requests to manage by escapement rather than total allowable catch (TAC), flexibility or removal of VMS and logbook requirements.
- Issues already included in the Council [workplan](#) submitted in October 2025 (the number in parentheses corresponds to the line number on the Council's workplan) - increased efficiency in the implementation and funding of the observer program (21, 26), cost recovery reform (13), removing economic data reporting requirements (2), revising maximum retainable allowances (5), revising Herring PSC limits and savings areas (23).
- New, specific issues that were not addressed in the workplan- modernizing recreational halibut management to address guided/unguided issues, review stellar sea lion closures, clarify regulations to allow all fish for disposal, including PSC, to go to fish meal plants and avoid discarding at sea.

NMFS has requested that we provide any workplan revisions by April 30, 2026; to meet this deadline, the Council would need to take action at this meeting. We have been informed, however, that NMFS will continue to accept revisions to the workplan in future, so if the October 2025 version continues to represent the Council's current priorities, there may be opportunity for the Council to add to the workplan with new projects at a later date.

### NMFS Risk/Value Matrix Process

The agency is proceeding with their initiative to narrow the scope of NMFS fisheries management and science, and presented the Council Executive Directors in January with a finalized risk/value matrix process. You may recall, as context from the Agenda B1 [presentation in June 2025](#), the agency's statement that they cannot continue to manage the 500+ stocks/stock complexes currently in nation-wide

FMPs. The intent of this process is to create and apply regional risk/value matrices that are co-developed with the Science Center, Regional Office, and Council. Concurrently, NMFS is also developing a national prioritization process, which will be used to assess resource priorities and alignment to inform FY27 planning.

While NMFS initially requested Council feedback by April 3<sup>rd</sup>, questions persist about better understanding the methodology used to determine where stocks fall along the matrix, and how the output will be used. The first step in the process, to place stocks in the matrix based on commercial and recreational value, would not be overly difficult for an AFSC-AKRO-Council staff workgroup, as such information is available. Subsequent steps, to review and adjust based on factors such as subsistence or cultural value, international management, or management effectiveness, and to consider the data needs for different quadrants on the matrix, will require more discussion and are unlikely to be achieved in a comprehensive way before the April 3<sup>rd</sup> deadline. To participate effectively in this initiative will require some dedicated time from staff.

Many of the outcomes that could result from this type of process have already been implemented in the North Pacific, such as managing species in complexes, moving stocks to the Ecosystem Component, or removing them from the FMP altogether when they are predominantly caught in State waters. Additionally, the Council completed a [groundfish stock prioritization process](#) with the AFSC in February 2023 (agenda item D3) which considered the risk associated with changing assessment frequency, and the Council has recently been engaging with the AFSC on their survey prioritization process to align data collection needs with revised capacity.

### **Staff News – New Deputy Director**

Following an internal hiring process, Ms. Anna Henry has accepted the position of Deputy Director. Anna has been an extremely competent fishery analyst/economist for the North Pacific Council for the past 7 years, during which she has worked on a wide variety of fishery management actions, especially catch share, halibut bycatch, and electronic monitoring actions.

We are awaiting more certainty about our Council budget before backfilling for her position.

### **Bycatch Report Presentation**

As requested by the Council at the December meeting, a short bycatch report update is posted as an attachment to the B1 report. The slides present Alaska bycatch data that is compiled annually by AKFIN, and update information provided in the “*Fish Bycatch in the North Pacific Halibut, Hippoglossus stenolepis, and Groundfish Fisheries*,” ([Witherell and Fey 2023](#)) paper. Michael Fey (PSMFC) will provide a short oral presentation, however to allow for the appropriate context, you will receive this during Agenda Item B2, following the NMFS Inseason Management Report presentation.

### **Unguided Rental Vessel Definition Discussions**

Rachel Baker and Sarah Marrinan attended a virtual meeting convened by State of Alaska Representative Himschoot on January 20th, to provide information in support of her efforts to develop a working definition of unguided rental vessels. While NPFMC representatives are restricted to providing technical and factual guidance relative to any proposed State of Alaska legislative text, context was shared on NPFMC authority and previous NPFMC considerations relative to unguided rental vessels. The slides are posted to the eAgenda for reference.

### **IRA/Climate Readiness Progress Updates**

As the Council's [climate resilience planning](#) work continues, Council staff are taking additional steps to help communicate progress, share resources, and identify opportunities for public engagement. The Council's website includes a new Harvest Control Rule [webpage](#) focusing on ongoing work to consider

whether alternative harvest control rules could perform better than the status quo under changing ecosystem conditions. New resources will be posted to this page as they become available. The SSC will receive an update on the Council's HCR work at this meeting, and the SSC, AP, and Council will discuss this work at the June 2026 Council meeting.

As a reminder, interested members of the public can sign up for an optional [climate readiness email list](#) to receive occasional updates on the Council's climate readiness work.

### **GOA Pacific cod assessment in February**

In December, the Council requested that the AFSC update the assessment in early 2026 instead of waiting until fall of 2026, to allow for a potential mid-season adjustment to the 2026 TAC if warranted by the new assessment. The Council requested a B report update in February on the feasibility of scheduling a special meeting in March to review the GOA Pacific cod assessment, and tradeoffs that would be incurred by requesting this assessment out of cycle. Following the December Council meeting, AFSC staff reassessed and reduced the time they would need to prepare a GOA cod assessment incorporating new catch and survey data, and were able to complete the assessment in time to allow review at the already-scheduled Groundfish Plan Team meeting on January 21st, and for the SSC and Council to consider updating GOA cod OFL/ABC/TAC at this Council meeting.

While we were thus able to accommodate the assessment review, we did not want to ignore the Council's interest in reflecting on the effects of an out-of-cycle request for a new groundfish assessment. From the Council staff perspective, because the review was able to be incorporated within already-scheduled meetings, the effects turned out to be largely minimal. These effects would have been greater had new, additional meetings had been required, as setting up Plan Team, SSC, and Council meetings out of cycle requires considerable coordination and staff time, both with members and to communicate clearly with the public, and trades off with progress on other Council analytical projects. Additionally, the Council budget would have needed to adjust to the cost of the unplanned virtual meetings. Due to our advance public notice requirements, the Council staff would have already incurred the cost of this reprioritization to plan for a special meeting, regardless of whether the Council chose to go forward in February.

The NMFS Regional Office and AFSC reports may provide further insight into tradeoffs incurred from their perspectives.

### **SSC and AP Election of Officers**

Each year, the AP and SSC elect new Chair(s) and Vice Chair(s) for their respective bodies, from among their members. These elections will take place at the start of their meetings and will be reported during the Council meeting.

### **Recent Staff and Council member activities**

- Nicole Kimball presented to a NOAA Science Advisory Board external task team on December 15<sup>th</sup> about our use of data from the fishery independent stock assessment program in the North Pacific. The Council also submitted [written responses](#) to the review team.
- Rachel Baker, John Moller, Dr. Kate Haapala, and Sarah Marrinan participated in the Bristol Bay Regional Advisory Council's (BBRAC) on January 12<sup>th</sup>, to continue outreach and engagement efforts on the Bering Sea chum salmon bycatch action. The January meeting had originally been scheduled to occur in October, but was postponed due to the government shutdown.
- Diana Evans participated in an Executive Director's meeting with National Marine Fisheries Service on January 20<sup>th</sup>, to discuss the budget, comments on EO 14276, and MSA prioritization.
- Anita Kroska and Taylor Holman attended sessions of the January 2026 Alaska Marine Science Symposium.

- Sara Cleaver and several Council and AP members participated in Marine Resources Education Program Steering Committee virtual planning sessions for the April 2026 workshop.
- Anna Henry participated in a Science Planning committee meeting for the 2026 Lowell Wakefield Fisheries Symposium which will take place in Kodiak May 5-8.

### **Committee and Plan Team Meetings**

The following Committee and Plan Team meetings have occurred since the December meeting:

- A BSAI crab assessment modeling workshop occurred in Seattle, WA from January 13-15, and the BSAI Crab Plan Team met virtually on the afternoon of January 15. The SSC will receive a partial report under Agenda D4, and the Council will receive reports in June.
- A public team workshop on developing alternative harvest control rules occurred on January 20<sup>th</sup>, and the Groundfish Plan Teams met virtually on January 21<sup>st</sup>. The SSC will receive reports under Agenda D4, and the Council will receive reports in June. In addition, the GOA Groundfish Plan Team reviewed the GOA Pacific cod assessment, and will report under Agenda C1.

### **Meeting this week**

We are anticipating considerable public testimony during this meeting on the C2 Chum Salmon Bycatch final action agenda item. It is our intent to open the wall between the Council and AP rooms once the AP concludes and we have had a chance to break down the AP equipment.

The Western Alaska Community Development Association (WACDA) is hosting a gathering for attendees of the Council meeting, on Wednesday February 4<sup>th</sup>. A [flyer](#) is posted to the eAgenda.

### **Meeting platforms**

We recently experienced a zoom bombing incident during our virtual Crab Plan Team zoom meeting, which has caused us to reexamine and consider how to tighten our security protocols. While our public meetings will remain accessible, we may need to institute some additional security steps such as registration with an email address for committee and Plan Team meetings.

Ms. Davis will also provide a short update on new features available through our Council eAgenda to search for a specific written comment, which may be useful during this meeting to locate attachments.

### **IFQ Report to the Fleet**

The annual IFQ report to the fleet, prepared by Michael Fey (PSMFC/AKFIN), is posted as an attachment to the B1 report. You will receive a short oral presentation on the report.

### **Inseason Salmon Genetics Research Update**

Jordan Head, Executive Director of the Bristol Bay Science and Research Institute (BBSRI), will present results from an in-season genetic stock identification project developed to provide actionable in-season information on chum salmon bycatch in the shoreside B-season Bering Sea pollock fishery, at the Council's request. The presentation will describe the motivation for the project, the transition from feasibility testing in 2024 to full operational deployment in 2025, and how weekly in-season stock-composition estimates were produced and publicly released during the fishery. Mr. Head will highlight analytical advancements tested in 2025, including spatially explicit fishing-ground analyses and rapid "lightning-strike" assessments of high-bycatch events, and will present a case study from Statistical Week 38 demonstrating how in-season genetic information was used to evaluate stock-specific risk and support avoidance considerations related to Western Alaska chum salmon stocks.